

Revival Won't Come to America Without These Crucial Elements

Three events just happened to encourage me and change my perspective.

I had the great privilege of being interviewed on *Greenelines*, the podcast of Dr. Steve Greene, publisher and executive vice president for the media group of Charisma Media.

As we got ready to sign off, Dr. Greene spoke several kind words to me. Among them was this statement: "I honor and respect you."

What a pleasant impact those affirming words had on my soul.

In the desert where there is rarely rainfall, animals and plants learn how to conserve water in the most ingenious ways.

I am a pastor who is also a woman. Honor has, at times, been in short supply. When I receive it, I find ways to hold on to it like one of those desert creatures with water!

The second event was talking with a young pastor from a foreign country. He confided in me that he had few friends and that he treasured the friendship of my husband and me.

He is a brilliant young pastor, fiery and Spirit-filled. I can understand if others might be stand-offish, even jealous. He is bold. I reassured him of our friendship and commiserated by speaking of my rejections that have come at times not only from being a woman pastor, but also because of being a charismatic pastor—and now, a "grandma pastor." I told him that all three of these characteristics, at times, have brought exclusion.

He answered *me* by sharing a sermon illustration he had heard about a church praise team. His story was this:

All the people of the team were professionals in music. One old woman of the congregation said to them, "I want to be part of the team." They said, "We need to hear you and see if we approve of your voice."

She sang, but her voice was to them very bad, and they said to her, "Get out."

She prayed to God in her sadness and said, "'God, I only wanted to give you honor." God replied, "What happened?"

She said, "The people of the team would not let me sing."

And God said to her, "What team? I do not listen to them. I only hear your voice.'"

I must admit that when the young pastor related this story to me in his broken English, I was very touched. As with Dr. Greene's words, I heard God speaking to my heart consolation and recognition. "You are the God who sees me," Hagar said (see Gen. 16:13). I say it too.

The third event was a prayer walk that I took a few days ago.

We have a beautiful park near us that surrounds a fishing pond. There is a forested area on one side of the pond and a hiking trail that leads up through it to a high viewpoint. I began to listen to praise music and to walk the hill and pray.

Swiftly some memories began to rise up from the past.

I remembered being at a Stephen Ministry conference years ago in San Antonio. The organizers of the meeting had us sit around tables to share devotional times. They would supply scriptures on handouts and invite us to read, pray, and interact in small groups in between the larger sessions.

I remember a moment when one of the men at the table, also a pastor, took his turn to read the Scripture handout. The organizers had made the choice to use inclusive language as a thoughtful gesture so that words like "mankind" read as "humanity" or "people." Their changes weren't much, and it was not an assault on the meaning or most of the wording of the text.

But the man chose to change every word back to a masculine form as he read, I guess to put me in my place, for his glaring looks were aimed across the table at me. I thought, "No matter how you feel about making inclusive language changes, why take the moment to be so obviously hostile?"

Another memory popped up on this walk, that of getting my . degree. It had taken three years of hard work with travel back to the East Coast for class work and travel to historical sites there. My class had consisted of all men, and both professors were men. How proud and happy I was the moment I walked across the stage and heard, "Rev. Dr..."

But that joy-filled time was tainted by a conversation at a celebratory luncheon at one of our professor's homes. One of my classmates chose that very moment to turn to me and tell me how much he disapproved of women in the pulpit, how unbiblical it is and so on.

I thought, Has he not realized after three years that I am a woman? Does he think I am neuter gender, or one of his buddies with whom he can confide about the place of women?

It had been hard enough to go through three years of being "the odd man out," as they went out after classes together, shared dinners and so on. I spent a lot of time alone attending those on-site classes.

A third memory came up, that of being on a mission trip with a woman roommate assigned to be with me. At one point, we were sitting in the room chatting. She began to tell me of how her

church was failing. I told her that I was sorry to hear that. "What is going wrong?" I asked.

She said, "We hired a woman assistant pastor. We should not have done that. I am sure God disapproves of this action—allowing a woman to preach and lead."

Again, I thought, *Have you not noticed I am a woman? Why say such a hurtful thing? It's bad enough that you think God has the type of character that would cause Him to destroy your church because you hired a woman, but have you no grace for me either?*

Memories like this kept bubbling up as I walked. Many more could have come to the surface, but what I felt in that moment was a desire to stop this train of thought immediately. "Oh Lord," I prayed. "I am so sorry. I was sure I had really forgiven these people. I thought I had released all of this and healed these soul wounds long ago. I am so sorry for going down this line of thinking again!"

By this point, I began to weep as I was walking. So, I sat down for a moment on a park bench, continuing to pray while quickly trying to compose myself. It was then that I heard the Holy Spirit say, "*You don't understand. I am bringing these memories up. Yes, you have forgiven. You have allowed me to heal your soul. You *don't* go back over these things. You have 'buried them in the sea,' as is the way of God.*"

"But I am trying to let you know," the Spirit continued, "that I hated these things you've endured. Every time you were treated this way, pushed aside or simply dishonored, made less effective by people's biases and hard-heartedness, I hated it—as I hate all dishonoring. These are My tears."

And then, at last, I understood. I had always felt my pain in those moments of being mistreated for being a woman pastor was simply my problem. Since there is debate among communities about whether women should preach or not, based on people's

varying interpretations of Scripture, I carried some sort of deep-down feeling that God was disengaged from it. It was trivial and not His problem. It was my problem. My heartache. I felt the Holy Spirit say, "I am weeping for you, for the way you were treated in those times."

This was a breakthrough moment for me. I felt a great rush of God's love and affection surge through me along with great peace. I received an enormous, much-needed revelation. God hates when you or I are put down unnecessarily. The Spirit hates this. He was saying, "I share your burdens. I care for you, for every area of your experiences."

As I got back up, refreshed, I heard the Spirit say the most important thing, "I love *honor*. I love *unity*. If My people want My presence, then they must seek to honor all people, not lift up some and disgrace others. And, of course, that does not mean accepting sin, as some will rush to say. I mean honoring the potential gold within each person as I help them to separate from sin."

I thought about all the smug arguments about theology, politics and other issues on social media and television. In mere moments, a cascade of images flooded my mind of people disdained, abused, cast aside, disliked, unwanted, excluded or shunned went rushing through my mind as well. God's extraordinary compassion for all wounded people swept over me in this encounter.

These precious words in the book of James came to mind:

My brothers, have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, without partiality. For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your assembly, and also a poor man in ragged clothing comes in, and you have respect for him who wears the fine clothing and say to him, "Sit here in a good place," and say to the poor, "Stand there," or "Sit here under my footstool," have you not then become partial among

yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well (James 2:1-4, 8).

God clearly would not have us discriminate against the poor, but in truth, He does not want us to dismiss anyone. Honor must be a two-way street. God commands, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10, ESV).

Leviticus 19:15 (NIV, emphasis added) has this teaching: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great *but judge your neighbor fairly.*"

You can see that there is a call for fairness and respect in all directions. This is what is biblical.

They will know we are Christians by our love!

In this season of much conflict in our country, of appropriate concern about discrimination, we run the risk of correcting bias towards one group by going overboard in bias against another group. Our country will not be blessed with the increasing presence of God as long as we abandon the Spirit's push for us to display honor and unity with one another and all in this hour.

I don't mean unity that is built on false pretenses or coercion to think one way only, but rather, that built out of a genuine desire to respect differing backgrounds and points of view even where there is disagreement. Honor must be for rich and poor, people of color and white, young and old, male and female, and so on.

And this is where the Holy Spirit will be poured out—where there is honor and unity, dignity given to others in *obedience* to God. The decision is up to us.

Do we want more of the Holy Spirit? {eoa}

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